

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3455  
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST  
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT, UK  
SUBJECT: POLITICAL MARCHES BANNED IN LONDON

REF: LONDON 2574

1. REACTING TO RECENT PUBLIC DISORDERS ARISING FROM POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS BY THE NEO-FASCIST NATIONAL FRONT (NF), NF PLANS TO STAGE A PROVOCATIVE MARCH IN THE ILFORD NORTH CONSTITUENCY FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE BY-ELECTION (REFTEL) AND GROWING PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT RACE RELATIONS, LONDON POLICE COMMISSIONER SIR DAVID MCNEE FEBRUARY 22 ANNOUNCED A TWO-MONTH BAN ON ALL PUBLIC PROCESSIONS, OTHER THAN RELIGIOUS OR CEREMONIAL. IN EXPLAINING THE BANNING ORDER, ISSUED PURSUANT TO THE 1936 PUBLIC ORDER ACT, MCNEE SAID HE HAD TAKEN THE ACTION BECAUSE THE PLANNED MARCH WAS LIKELY TO TRIGGER COUNTER-DEMONSTRATIONS AND LEAD TO SERIOUS PUBLIC DISORDER. MCNEE'S DECISION WAS APPROVED BY HOME SECRETARY MERLYN REES AND ENDORSED BY COMMUNITY LEADERS AND MOST OF THE BRITISH MEDIA.

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2. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, THE NF WAS ANGERED BY THE DECISION AND INTENDS TO GO AHEAD WITH A SCHEDULED FEBRUARY 25 BY-ELECTION MEETING IN ILFORD NORTH. NF SPOKESMEN ALSO ASSERTED THAT ITS SUPPORTERS WOULD ENGAGE IN A "MASS CANVASS EXERCISE" PRIOR TO THE MEETING. PREDICTABLY, THE TROTSKYITE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY (SWP) CALLED ON ITS SUPPORTERS TO ASSEMBLE

IN ILFORD NORTH ON THE DAY OF THE NF'S MEETING AND TO "OPPOSE THE FRONT WHEREVER THEY APPEAR IN THE STREETS". OTHER GROUPS, SUCH AS THE NEWLY FORMED ANTI-FASCIST LEAGUE AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM, ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO BE ACTIVE IN THE AREA OVER THE WEEKEND, INCREASING THE CHANCE OF VIOLENT CLASHES WITH NF SUPPORTERS.

3. COMMENT: THE PRESS REPORTS THAT THE BANNING ORDER REPRESENTS THE MOST EXTENSIVE USE OF THE PUBLIC ORDER ACT SINCE 1948. THE BRITISH VALUE THEIR TRADITION OF POLITICAL FREEDOM AND ARE LOATH TO RESTRICT IT, EVEN TEMPORARILY, SO MCNEE'S DECISION WAS TAKEN RELUCTANTLY. IN THE LIGHT OF THE NF'S OVERTLY PROVOCATIVE TACTICS, THE AUGUST RIOTS IN LEWISHAM AND RECENT PUBLIC DISORDERS PROVOKED BY THE FRONT IN THE MANCHESTER AREA, IT WAS NO DOUBT THE CORRECT ONE. WHILE WE DO NOT EXPECT THE BANNING ORDER WILL PREVENT VIOLENCE IN ILFORD NORTH BETWEEN NOW AND THE MARCH 2 BY-ELECTION, IT SHOULD REDUCE ITS LEVEL AND MAKE ANY INCIDENTS THAT DO OCCUR EASIER FOR THE POLICE TO CONTROL.

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